

honor your Self

"I'M GOING TO BE ALL THE ME I CAN BE. HOPEFULLY I CAN BRING YOU A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE SO THAT THE NEXT TIME YOU WON'T BRING THE SAME ASSUMPTIONS."



Michael Beers 26
Blackfeet
Hellgate High School
Comedian/Advocate for people with disabilities

Michael Beers is a funny guy. "Laughter," he says, "is the shortest distance between two people. If you laugh together, other things go away—skin color, abilities, etc." Michael is a Native American comic and advocate for people with disabilities. Mostly, though, he is a storyteller like his role models Bill Cosby, Richard Pryor and Chris Fonseca. "It's a form of expression," he says, "a way of coping with day-to-day life." Adopted by a non-Native family, Michael was drawn to the storytelling part of his culture when he later met his birth family. "Storytelling and laughter," he says, "were the first two things we all connected on."

"SHOW UP. I'M NOT THE FUNNIEST COMIC. I'M NOT THE MOST EDUCATED ADVOCATE. BUT I'M SUCCESSFUL BECAUSE WHEN PEOPLE CALLED ME, I CHOSE TO SHOW UP. THERE ARE LOTS WHO DIDN'T."

Michael's comedy often centers around his disability, which he tried to disguise in high school for fear of being different. But once he started doing comedy and working in the disability rights movement, the two came together naturally. "For me," he says, "there's something about getting it out there that makes it real so that you're able to cope with fear. You're using humor to combat it. The second you tell something and then laugh about it, it's hard to be afraid of it."

As an advocate, Michael travels the country speaking at national conferences and at schools where he shares his story and encourages young people to find their dreams. "Keep showing up," he advises about school. "until you find the one teacher, the one assignment that makes you want to learn. Find the thing you connect with that will get you to graduation. You'll have a lot more opportunities after graduating." As for Michael's long-term goals? He says he just wants to keep getting better at comedy. He feels best when he's making people laugh. "Humor," he says, "takes us 180 degrees from where we started."



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